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Westly, Environmental Groups Urge U.S. Senate to Reject Offshore Drilling Plan

SANTA MONICA - State Controller Steve Westly today, along with environmental leaders, called on members of the U.S. Senate to reject an amendment to President Bush's energy bill that would allow oil exploration off California's coast.

"Californians should know that officials thousands of miles away are deciding the fate of our precious coast," Westly said. "Oil exploration threatens not only our environment, but also our coastal economy and multi-billion dollar tourism industry."

The U.S. Senate is expected to vote in the coming weeks on an amendment to President Bush's energy bill by Senators Pete Domenici (R-New Mexico) and Mary Landrieu (D-Louisiana). The amendment would allow seismic survey ships to begin intensive exploration for oil and gas off coastal shores. Documented scientific evidence shows that the underwater explosions used by the ships damage fisheries and marine mammals.

Humboldt, Mendocino, Sonoma, San Diego, and Orange Counties, as well as along the coast of Palos Verdes, Malibu, and within the Santa Monica Bay are possible targets of exploration.

In addition, the Senate may consider allowing states to "opt-out" of the federal moratorium on offshore oil and gas leasing, which has been in place since 1991. Under this proposal, these protections could never be restored.

Over the past several months, Controller Westly has urged members of California's Congressional delegation and state elected leaders to speak out against offshore oil drilling. Last week he urged California delegation members to join together and speak with one voice prior to the imminent Senate vote.

California's 1,200-mile coastline helped to attract last year 300 million tourists from around the nation and the world. Coastal businesses comprise one of the healthiest fiscal engines of the state's economy, adding to the total \$82.5 billion the tourism industry produced in 2004.

"For the sake of our environment, our economy, and future generations of Californians, we can't let our pristine coastline be turned into an oil field," said Westly, who also serves on the State Lands Commission.

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